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***Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* by Carl Cassegård. Leiden, Boston: Global Oriental, 2014, xiii + 289 pp., $148.00 (hardcover ISBN 978-90-04-24591-4)**

Julia Obinger / University of Zurich

Lifestyle and activities of young Japanese have captured the interest of scholars for years, even more so during times of economic recession. What has been puzzling to many observers is that, despite growing socioeconomic risks that threaten the livelihood of young Japanese workers, there has been a conspicuous absence of large-scale protest rallies in Japan after the 1970s. Consequently, younger Japanese had been regarded as generally disinterested in political issues, showing seemingly little political activity or civic engagement. Looking beyond conventional forms of participation, emergent forms of activism have hardly received attention. Against this background, Carl Cassegård, cultural sociologist at the University of Gothenburg, presents us with a highly topical and detailed volume on youth movements in Japan, successfully challenging pre-established notions on Japan's "apathetic" youth. This book fills a gap by delivering an ethnographically grounded overview of the historical development of previously hidden networks and associations and their unconventional forms of activism. Based mainly on Japanese sources and his own original fieldwork data collected between 2004 and 2012, his compilation of case studies spans from the pioneers of late 1980s youth activism across freeter activists in the 1990s as well as support groups for NEET and the homeless in the early 2000s to the most recent anti-nuclear demonstrations starting in 2011. What makes this volume so valuable is Cassegård's identification of interconnections between fragmented activist groups of the precarity movement, presenting evidence how they established their role as innovators within Japan's civil society and larger socio-political context.

Cassegård's work is guided by the underlying questions of why Japanese protest movements were relatively weak after the failure of the radical student movements of the 1970s, and why and how they evolved in their particular forms until today. His main argument is that freeters (which he uses as umbrella term for young precarious irregular employees) emerged as group of social agents "untainted by the dogmatism of the New Left" (p. 235), and played a crucial role in the resurgence of leftist movement activism, creating a new "infrastructure of protest" (p. 6). On the basis of his historical analysis, he argues that protest movements we encounter in today's Japan, including the anti-nuclear demonstrations after 3/11, are in many aspects a continuation of developments that began already during the 1980s.

He approaches his analysis of the freeter activists through three theoretical vantage points: collective trauma, alternative space and empowerment. Cassegård explains how the Japanese society has suffered collective trauma not only through the violent student protests ("the trauma of the New Left"), but also due to recent neoliberal reforms and new socioeconomic risks. He asserts that irreparable damage has been done to the self-perception of many Japanese, carefully explaining his notion of a collective trauma as a complex social and discursive process. Even though activists of the precarity movement are heterogeneous in their aims and driven by either material or cultural concerns (or sometimes both), their common denominator is, according to Cassegård, their approach of a "therapeutic activism" in response to collective trauma. As an extension to the established notions of instrumental and prefigurative activism, he argues that "[t]herapeutical activism is politically important since it helps *producing* actors experiencing themselves as capable of political action" (p. 26), thus inducing the feeling of empowerment.
Within the precarity movement, the establishment of support groups and unions that address material needs is one component of this empowerment. Moreover, therapeutical activism engenders empowerment in alternative spaces, which constitute havens for marginal groups. There, social ties are forged and their specific cultural repertoire comes alive. These spaces can for example take the shape of homeless' cardboard house villages, recycle shops or alternative cafés on university campuses. Other distinctive sources for empowerment are the formation of a common language and narrative and generally a playful, creative attitude, which sets the young activists apart from established social movements in Japan. In search of "new ways of living beyond the confines of capitalist society" (p. 97), some activists even chose to drop out of society altogether in search of a simpler lifestyle, like the group *Dameren*; others experiment with circumventing wage-labor by founding their own shops, like the association *Amateurs' Riot*. Therefore, activists focus on inducing changes to their immediate living situation, which Cassegård interprets not only as protest directed against neoliberal reforms and deteriorating working conditions, but also as a revolt against the inflexible set of societal norms that were cemented during the "bubble economy" era.
In addition, and especially after 2000, non-violent disruptive public protests play an increasingly important role within the youth movements. Cassegård explains how some of the actors emulated the spirit of previous movements, like the 1960s anti-war activists (i.e. *Beiheiren*), for the 2003 demonstrations against the Iraq war; activists of the freeter movement also took to the more recent

transnational movements (i.e. *Euromayday*) for inspiration. Throughout the book it becomes very clear how the activists' specific language of contestation has been evolving over time, increasingly emphasizing artistic expression. Examples for this are the so-called "sound-demos", which utilize techno, punk and hip-hop music as their main feature, or the free-style paintings on homeless cardboard dwellings during the *Shinjuku Cardboard Village* struggle. Cassegård thus asserts that the precarity movement (and its predecessors) have evoked a "recovery of activism" by introducing new means and languages of contestation, making use of alternative space in their attempts to reach out to and empower subaltern groups, and standing in stark opposition to the ideologically informed protest style of the radical student movement.

Cassegård's brilliantly masters the immense task of assembling the diverse accounts of "lovable anarchists, pragmatic leaders, saintly hermits, stern autonomists, former social withdrawers, pranksters and agitators" (p. xi) of the precarity movement into one volume, carefully carving out their commonalities and differences. While his presentation of empirical material and overall findings are extremely compelling, I find some minor shortcomings in his analytical and theoretical framework. For instance, when we consider the diverse groups he presents throughout his volume, Cassegård's interchanging use of the labels "youth movement", "freeter movement" and "precarity movement" can be misleading without further specification.
Given that the strength of Cassegård's book evidently lies in his meticulous collection and detailed description of a fragmented and diverging field, I nonetheless wonder whether readers without previous knowledge will find this compilation a little hard to navigate; to facilitate access to the case studies, readers might first want to familiarize with the well-arranged table on key events and major organizations from the 1980s onwards in the appendix (pp. 253).
Moreover, while it is clear that Cassegård's primary aim is to analyze the movements' trajectories, he devotes less analysis to their respective material circumstances than might be expected in a monograph on precarious groups. Considering Cassegård's intimate knowledge of the field, a more critical contextualization or even the challenging of the activists' standpoints in respect to their sociocultural framing would have been very interesting.

Cassegård's work by no means lacks theoretical grounding, but the overall explanatory power of his concepts is not quite evident to me in some instances. In a volume that deals with social movements, I would have welcomed a more explicit integration of established concepts of movement theory, i.e. mobilization, framing and political opportunity structures, not least in order to embed his analysis within existing scholarship. In that respect, while I agree to his point that a collective trauma (or rather, the overcoming of trauma by therapeutical activism) forms the common ground between these movements, I am not sure whether this concept is really the most suitable lens for fully explaining the trajectory of his sample groups. My reservations regarding his framework are also based on Cassegård's introducing of additional theoretical considerations in each of his chapters, like for example his elaborate theory of public sphere and counter-spaces, which he however only fully explicates in his final chapter. Understanding that some chapters were specifically designed to be read independently of each other, I would have nevertheless wished for more structural cohesiveness and an overarching integration of recurring theoretical issues, and for a more explicit and consistent application of his theoretical framework on his case studies throughout the book. In this respect, a more concise closing chapter to summarize and recontextualize the issues raised within the separate chapters would have complimented Cassegård's analysis, helping the reader to even better grasp the rhizomatic structure and interconnections between the disparate movements in their respective time-frames.

Nonetheless, by carefully dissecting their different layers and digging deep into the pre-history of the precarity movements from the 1980s to the present, Cassegård's densely written book gives us great insight into their interconnections and motivations, which were previously unavailable in such a comprehensive manner in either Japanese or Western languages. In this regard, I personally find the chapter on the formation of Freeter Unions and PAFF and their connections to established unions especially intriguing, as well as his section on recent student activities in Kyoto; also, I would like to highlight his extensive chapter on homeless activism, which draws together many previously unpublished aspects of the homeless movement, like the details on the struggle over evictions in *Nagai Park*. In my view, this is a great sourcebook not only for the study of Japanese civil society, but also for those interested in alternative lifestyles and recent socio-political developments. Considering that existing scholarship on Japanese social and political movements focuses mainly on larger, better established and more visible groups, I find Cassegård's collection of smaller, hidden associations very fresh and inspiring.